

The Tragic Days

Kennedy Assassination -

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DALLAS, Tex. (AP) — "My God! I am hit!" the first man cried.

"Oh, no, no, no! My God, they are going to kill us all!" cried the second man.

And so began 48 hours and 37 minutes of trauma and tragedy a decade ago.

The dead:

President John F. Kennedy.

Police officer J. D. Tippit.

Lee Harvey Oswald.

The wounded:

Texas Gov. John B. Connally.

A decade ago in time, but still vivid in the mind of a nation. Still terrible, the details of that November day in Dallas ...

The air was sharp and a bright sun beamed out of a cloudless sky when Air Force One landed at Dallas' Love Field at 11:37 a.m. on Nov. 22, 1963.

The Kennedys had come from Fort Worth, 30 miles away, where they had spent the night after stops in San Antonio and Houston. A political trip to campaign for future elections and help fill the Democrats' coffers.

Kennedy was to appear at a fund-raising dinner that night in Austin, after a luncheon address at the Trade Mart in downtown Dallas.

With him was his wife, Jacqueline, clutching a bouquet of red roses against her pink suit. In the party were his vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson; Gov. Connally, and Sen. Ralph Yarborough of Texas.

A motorcade would take them to the Trade Mart, where already 2,500 persons were expected.

Twice on its way downtown the line of cars stopped so Kennedy could greet school children waving to him from sidewalks.

Thousands of people lined the route as the motorcade turned westward into the business section. The atmosphere was happy, and it was hard to believe Kennedy had lost Dallas County

three years before.

Yet some in Dallas were fearful.

The Secret Service had asked for extra Dallas policemen to help. Chief Jesse Curry gave the Service all it asked and called in still more men.

Some thought the militant right wing might try a demonstration. United Nations Ambassador Adlai Stevenson had been spat upon here a month before. Scurrilous handbills had been circulated on the eve of Kennedy's arrival.

And there were all those thousands of windows in the tall buildings from which an assault could be launched.

The motorcade crawled west on Main. Turn right. One block along Houston. Left onto Elm at a nondescript old brick structure seven stories high. The Texas School Book Depository.

Chief Curry drove the leading car. "Looks like we got it made," he commented as his own car passed the depository.

Three rapid shots split the air.

One bullet struck President Kennedy in the neck and traveled downward. Another hit his head. "My God! I am hit!" he exclaimed, Secret Service Agent Roy Kellerman testified later.

Gov. Connally, riding on a jump seat just ahead of the president, was struck by a bullet which passed through his back and chest before emerging and causing a crippling wound in his right wrist. Then, almost spent, it struck Connally in a thigh. It was he who exclaimed, "My God, they are going to kill us all!"

Agent Clinton J. Hill jumped from the backup car and ran to the president. Kennedy's skull was destroyed.

Hill told the Warren Commission, "Mrs. Kennedy had jumped up from the seat and was, it appeared to me, reaching for something coming off the right rear bumper of the car, the right rear tail, when

she noticed that I was trying to climb on the car. She turned toward me and I grabbed her and put her back in the back seat, crawled up on top of the back seat and lay there."

In the front seat, Agent Kellerman grabbed a microphone and shouted to the lead car, "We are hit. Get us to the hospital immediately."

Agent William Greer, the presidential car driver, floored the accelerator. One agent cocked an automatic rifle.

At 80 miles per hour, the motorcade raced for Parkland Hospital. The agents rode with drawn sidearms.

Mrs. Kennedy, overcome by shock and grief, did not want to surrender her husband who was lying in her lap. He was taken from her into the hospital.

Doctors rushed to Trauma Rooms 1 and 2 — No. 1 for the president, No. 2 for the governor. The doctors testified that Kennedy was breathing and a pulse could be detected in a leg.

But it was hopeless.

Two Roman Catholic priests administered the last rites.

The open-top presidential car sat abandoned at the emergency entrance of the hospital with Jacqueline's red roses trampled on the floorboards.

The announcement came: "President Kennedy is dead. Official time of death: 1 p.m."

Oneal Funeral Home brought its best grade of casket and backed a black hearse to the emergency entrance dock.

Jacqueline refused to leave her husband. She walked to the edge of the dock and stood there, frozen-faced, straight as a pillar, her eyes focused a hundred thousand miles away.

Attendants rolled Kennedy's casket up behind her, placed it in the hearse and closed the doors. Mrs. Kennedy turned to the right, walked to the front of the hearse and sat beside the driver.

Lyndon Johnson, meanwhile, had been spirited to the airport. He slumped in the car seat. The accompanying guard cars kept their sirens silent.

He did not want to ride in Air Force One, but advisers demanded it, for it held superior communications gear and Johnson was president now — if not technically at this moment, then soon.

Advisers wanted Johnson to

fly away at once from what still might be a danger zone, but he balked and refused to move until Kennedy's body reached the plane and Mrs. Kennedy arrived.

He called Mrs. Kennedy to him. Then U.S. District Court Judge Sarah T. Hughes swore Johnson in as 36th president of the United States.

Dallas had two police radio networks and both crackled with orders deploying squad cars throughout Dallas. Mexican border stations were alerted.

The orders: Arrest an "unknown white male, approximately 30, slender build, height 5 feet 10 inches, weight 165 pounds, reported to be armed with what is thought to be a .30-caliber rifle."

That was a rather poor description with which officer J.D. Tippit was to spot the suspect.

Oswald rode a bus for a short distance from the depository, alighted and hailed a taxicab. It took him across the Trinity River to a point near his rooming house. Oswald went to his room, donned a jacket and came outside again, the Warren Commission reported.

He was walking down a sidewalk when Tippit called to him.

The officer opened the car door and started around the vehicle. Oswald drew a second-hand .38-caliber Smith and Wesson and shot him four

times, the Warren Commission said, before Tippit could fully draw his pistol. Tippit died almost instantly, 16 minutes after Kennedy.

The young man fled toward Oak Cliff's main business street, then darted into the Texas Theatre, where officers captured him even as he drew his pistol again.

He was charged with the murder of Tippit first, then of Kennedy.

It was two days later, Sunday, when police brought Oswald down from an upper cell to the city jail basement. They planned to transfer him a few blocks away to the Dallas County jail as required by Texas law after a person is charged.

By now, police feared Oswald himself would be assassinated. They provided an armored car as a stalking horse while planning to spirit him secretly in an unmarked car the few blocks to the county installation.

Officers seemed almost anxious, however, that newsmen be allowed at some point to see and photograph Oswald. They knew the historic nature of the events of the last two or three days. And they wanted impartial observers to tell the public that the prisoner had not been mistreated while in custody.

About 50 newsmen were present in the city jail basement, kept back from the door through which Oswald would walk.

Down the vehicle ramp from the street to the basement strolled a short, pudgy character-about-town.

This was Jack Ruby, operator of two bars, the best known the downtown Carousel Club where strippers performed on stage and B-girls cadged drinks largely from conventioners.

Ruby walked to within a few feet of Oswald and shot him. It was 11:21 a.m., Nov. 24.

Oswald died in the same

trauma room where Kennedy succumbed, seven minutes later by the clock than did the president two days before.

Kennedy, Tippit and Oswald all were buried on Monday, three days after the presidential assassination.

John F. Kennedy went to his resting place in solemn rites in Arlington with delegations from 100 or more countries mourning with the nation.

J.D. Tippit's services were in a small Baptist church with 400 officers in crisply creased uniforms inside and another 1,000 paying tribute on the church grounds.

Lee Harvey Oswald was buried almost obscurely in a Fort Worth cemetery, and only relatives and reporters were present. Attending were his mother, Marguerite; his wife, Marina; his brother, Robert, and the Oswalds' two small children.

They alone wept.